

## Snow by Leafyleaf

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**Summary:**

El has never seen snow before, or celebrated Christmas, or been in one place with everyone she loved.

"Are you happy?" Mike smiled.

She thought about her old friends Dustin and Lucas who were playing with their new Terminator figures inside, and her new friends Max and Will who, after a few days of settling back into their normal lives, she had made sure to get to know. She thought about her three new almost-siblings Nancy, Jonathan and Steve – a thing she thought she'd never have after the disappointment of Kala, and her surrogate parents Joyce and Hopper who she knew would be still dancing to the loud Christmas music on the radio.

She nodded. "Yeah. Happy."

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“Mike?” Eleven asked as she gazed up at the stars. “I’ve never had a Christmas before. Am I doing it right?”

“Well that depends.”

She turned her head to the side and met eyes with him across the grass. “Depends?”

“Yeah, it depends. Are you happy?” Mike smiled.

She thought about her old friends Dustin and Lucas who were playing with their new Terminator figures inside, and her new friends Max and Will who, after a few days of settling back into their normal lives, she had made sure to get to know. She thought about her three new almost-siblings Nancy, Jonathan and Steve – a thing she thought she’d never have after the disappointment of Kala, and her surrogate parents Joyce and Hopper who she knew would be still dancing to the loud Christmas music on the radio.

She nodded. “Yeah. Happy.”

“You’re doing it right then, that’s all there is to it.” Mike paused and bit his lip, then looked up in thought. “Well, don’t tell my mom I said that. She’d say it was about Jesus and religion and all that, but really that hasn’t got much to do with it nowadays.”

El’s brow furrowed. “R-Religion?”

“Don’t worry about it. For us guys its about family. And not just the one you’re born with either, because sometimes they aren’t much of a family to begin with. I mean us. All of us. Me, and you, and those guys in there.” He sat up a little and wiggled his head from side to side to make the bells on his Santa hat chime. “All you have to do is have a good time.”

She smiled widely at his antics, and let out a small giggle. “I’m having a good time. I always have a good time when I’m with you.”

Mike’s cheeks flushed red – the curse of having pale skin – and he

blinked a few times, jaw going slack. “Uhh-oh, thanks I... I enjoy being with you too.”

“Good.”

“Good.”

Close by, a door was slammed open and bounced off the wall and Dustin’s voice rang out, “Mike! Where are you? Mike? Son-of-a-bitch you’re missing the cake!”

El turned towards the sound nonplussed. Mike rolled his eyes and scrambled to his feet.

“We’re coming!” he yelled, “just give me a second!”

El grabbed onto his outstretched hand and he pulled her to her feet, eyes softening again.

“Are we going in?” She asked.

“In a minute. I need to give you your present first.”

He reached down to where he had been laying and took the wrapped box in his hands. But when he stood up, Eleven wasn’t looking at him. She had her head tilted back and her finger outstretched to the sky, pointing to the white flakes that were beginning to fall.

“Snow?” She asked, eyes alight with wonder.

“Yeah, that’s snow. And if it keeps going for long enough it’ll set on the ground and we can make snowmen. And that will make you happy too, I think.”

She brought her hand down and brushed it back and forth through his fringe, poking out from under his hat. “Its all getting in your hair!”

“Yeah, it does that,” Mike laughed, grabbing her hand and bringing it back down to the space in between them. His thumb stoked absentmindedly over her knuckles. For a few seconds, he just smiled.

El's eyes continued to dart around to watch the crystals fall, oblivious to the white dusting that was forming in her own curly hair. To Mike, she looked beautiful. Ethereal.

"Eleven," he said softly, regaining her attention. "Do you want your present now?"

She nodded. "Yes please."

He held it out to her and she grabbed it with both hands. It was covered in a gold wrapping and on the top was a bow. The label was covered in writing that she couldn't read. After glancing up at Mike for permission, she turned it over and slid her finger under the edge of the paper.

She pulled it aside to reveal the brown of a cardboard box, which she brought up to her ear and shook.

"What is it?"

"Open it and see!"

She removed the lid and then froze, looking down at the gift.

"El? Are you okay?... Eleven?"

For a while she didn't reply, instead slowly reaching down and removing the walkie-talkie, dropping the box to the floor. She stared at it, and the paint on its surface, with tears welling in her eyes.

"Mike," she breathed out, soft as a sigh.

"I know, you don't have to use it if you don't want to, but we thought it was a good idea. You know, just in case anything happens. Or if we just want to talk, or if we all want to meet up or something. It wasn't really my idea, it was more Lucas, and it was Dustin who thought to paint on it. Will is the who actually did it though, you know he's the best artist -"

"Mike." El interrupted his nervous babble, and his hand fell from where it was nervously scratching the back of his head.

“Thank you, I love it.”

He exhaled shakily. “Good.”

Smiling at his nervousness, she stepped forwards and pulled his forehead down to rest on hers with a hand on the back of his neck. They swayed softly from side to side, in time with the Christmas music drifting over from the open window.

They were close enough to kiss again, Eleven thought. She liked kissing Mike. It was like nothing she’d ever had before. It was warm, and it was safe, and it made her insides smile. She’d never felt that way about anyone before.

Her lips tingled in anticipation, and she leant forwards on her tiptoes. Her eyes fell to a close.

“Eleven!” Hopper interrupted, leaning on the doorframe. “Come on in before Steve and Dustin eat everything. You too Michael, come and eat Joyce’s food before it gets cold.”

She hurriedly stepped back from Mike, whose cheeks were red again. “Okay, dad.”

Taking Mike’s hand in hers, she began to follow Hopper inside. They’d get another chance.

This was becoming the best first Christmas ever.